COMMUNION MEDITATION - Matt. 7:24-27 March 6, 1966

Have you turned the other cheek recently? Have you been persecuted for your faith recently? Have you been angry with someone or have you put your Christian discipleship before everything else in your life during the last week?

My text this morning is the parable of the wise and foolish builders, one of whom built a house on rock, a house which withstood the wind and rain; and the other of whom built on sand and watched his house collapse in a torrential downpour. This particular parable, however, is not an entity in and of itself. If it were, interpreting and applying it to life would be a rather simple matter. It seems to be saying that everyman must chose a foundation for his life, and that there are available only two choices. On the one hand a man can build his life of firm and lasting principles and because of this he will be able to withstand any of the storms that might come his way. On the other hand a man can live out of the context of arbitrary and weak principles, with the result that his life will come crashing down as soon as the going gets tough. That's simple enough; we'd like to haveit that way. We'd like to believe that if we live good lives--if we aremen of strong character, God will bless us and our lives will be smooth, comfortable and affluent. But unfortunately Jesus wasn 't saying that at all. The parable doesn't exist as a general principle; a guide to better living. It is, as it stands in the Gospel record, the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mt.

You will remember that the Sermon on the Mt., is a collection of Jesus' sayings and teachings, delivered to the twelve disciples in the presence of a vast throng of people. To read the Sermon carefully, to take it seriously as a guide to Christian living is an uncomfortable experience; for in it we hear that it is just as immoral to be angry as it is to kill; we hear that the poor in spirit--the peacemakers, the

wretched, humble people are blessed; we hear that revenge is no longer a valid principle; we hear that the task of a Christian is to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the leaven in the loaf. And then, if we have the courage to read on we discover that to hear these words and to do them is to build on rock; but to hear them and ignore them is to court the disaster of a superficial, meaningless life; a flimsy existence that is, in fact vulnerable to all kinds of environmental threats.

This is really what Jesus was saying; not that life will be rosy if we live right; but that to follow him is to do his words; and that to hear his words puts a man in the precarious position of having to either do them or reject them.

In our day the parable defines the nature of being a Christian. It is a push out the door, and abrupt shove out into life--an admonition to believe in Jesus Christ by obeying him, by doing something other than listening to him--or talk about him.

Now this is precisely when it would be more comfortable not to take the Bible seriously. It is at this point thatthe words of Mark Twain become meaningful when he remarked that he wasn't particulary bothered about the parts of the Bible that he couldn't understand; but that he was deeply distrubed by what he could understand. Clearly, the N.T. here and throughout, is calling for a kind of Christian activism, a sacrificial commitment that we don't even like to talk about.

In fact, in our day the issue might be presented in terms of buiding a house at all--or digging a hole and crawling in. One of the emerging characteristics of our culture is a general antipathy, a sense of involvement, a tendency to ignore the world and concentrate only on the problems of our own lives. Georgraphically, we do all in our power to escape the problems of thecity. When blight and poverty come, we turn tail and run,

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And from the comfort of suburbia insulate ourselves from the restof life. When we come to the Church, we come looking for more of the same. We want a comfortable religion, one which isolates us from everything and everyone else; we want to walk in the garden, alone with Jesus, walled off from the rest of the world. Theologically, we like to feel respectable and so we'll listen to doctrinal sermons; after all it doesn't hurt to talk about incarnation, the nature of God, redemptionand salvation. But we don't want the Church to involve us in anything else; we resent it when the church remins us that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a hollow, changing cymbol--when it remains within thses four walls. We want our religion to suppprt us, comfort us, even to help insulate us. And to us the parable might sound like this.

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a man who built his house in the middle of a storm; and when the rains and floods came he remained; his was a strong house, he was a strong man because he was doing the work of God. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man--who dug his home in the side l of the hill, to escape the storm, his neighbors, the bright light of day--the whole world. But the hole collapsed, and the man died, never having lived."

During the Lenten season our thoughts are directed to the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. It ought to be a time when we are made humbly uncomfortable. As we follow his direct march to Calvary we ought to sense that he didn't have to do it; that he could have savdd himself a lot of miseryif he just would have played it safe. He could have been a little more diplomatic with the scribes and pharisees; he didn't have to come to Jerusalem so conspicuously; he certainly could have done without that display of ~~harshness~~ brashness in the temple when the ejected the money changerrs; he could have been a little more discriminating inhis choice of friends and associates.

But Jesus, contrary to the way we would have arranged his life, sought out the storm centers of life; he looked for the problems; he said and did what he knew he ought to say and do--without flinching.

It is this spirit of active involvement that ought to emerge from our Lenten thinking. For in his passion, Jesus was teaching that the Christian life is one of doing as well as hearing. It is a time when we all might hear again the promises we made as we joined the church--promises to which several persons answered in the affirmative this morning; "Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace, to continue in the peace and fellowship of the people of God, and with the aid of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's faithful disciple to your life's end?"

To say "I do" to this question; to follow Jesus Christ, you see, is to build a house in the middle of the storm. It is not to guarantee tranquility and well being; in fact it is to gurantee a constant confrontation with the complexities and ambiguities of life. It is to actively follow him--by hearing his words and then doing them.

It is not to find the easy life--but it is to live completely and fully; it is to become the kind of men God intended us to be. It is to live in the assurance that we are part of that Kingdom our Lord heralded; the kingdom which is present whenever we obey him; the kingdom that extends beyond time--into eternity. Amen